

Student's Name

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Course Name

Date (e.g. 26 September 2015)

Milton and Christian Heroism

As an epic, *Paradise Lost* clearly follows the classical models presented by Homer and Virgil. Milton, however, bases his style, structure, and content primarily upon Christian doctrines as opposed to the pagan religions of the ancient writers, and the thematic motifs of his epic therefore display his personal devotion to Christianity. Although Milton's recurring theme of heroism often parallels that of the classics, his Christian definition fully realizes the potential of this classical virtue.

First, the hero and heroine of Milton's works resist their enemies far differently than classical heroes oppose their adversaries. For example, Odysseus must face Circe, and the Lady of *Comus* must likewise encounter her villainous son. Comus, like his mother, "off[ers]" his "Crystal Glass" to "every weary Traveller" (*Comus* lines 65, 63). Although these supernatural villains are similar, the protagonists of the two epics develop their authors' ideals of heroism very differently. First, classical heroes such as Achilles and Odysseus define their heroism partially through their physique. Interestingly, the protagonist of *Comus* is a woman who is physically incapable of protecting her innocence through sheer force. Despite this obvious limitation, her older brother remains convinced that her "[v]irtue may be assail'd but never hurt" (589). In fact, as Moore comments, "[t]he brothers . . . voice their concerns not in terms of what might happen to her but rather how she will respond" (5). The Lady, like Adam and Eve, is "free to fall," yet her virtue renders her completely "[s]ufficient to [stand]" (*PL* III.99). The temptation

Comment [R1]: Double Spaced.
1 inch margins on all sides.
TIMES NEW ROMAN, 12 point font.
The page number is made up of the student's last name and the page number on the upper right hand header.

Comment [R2]: Center the Title

Comment [R3]: Thesis statement. Tells the audience what the paper is intending to prove.

Comment [R4]: We know this is the first point! Introduces topic sentence.

Comment [R5]: Introduces support.

Comment [R6]: If you want to quote a text but want to change tense/ending of a word to make it fit into your sentence, put brackets around the change. For example, the original word was "off'rd," so it was changed to "off[ers]" to keep as much of the word as possible but still have it make sense in the paper as well as keep it in present tense.

Comment [R7]: When quoting poetry, cite the name of the poem first, then write the word line(s). The next time you cite that poem, you don't have to write the word line(s) because you have already established that it is a poem.

Comment [R8]: These ellipses are used to show that the writer has cut out a portion of the sentence he has quoted in order to get to the part he wants his audience to read. Be sure to use these every time you omit a word in a sentence.

is therefore a test of her character rather than of her physical capabilities. Whereas Odysseus, a classical hero defined by “immense physical strength, superior to all compeers” but is not necessarily “morally adequate” (Herman 13), defeats Circe’s charms through cunning, the Lady overcomes her foe intellectually. She cries out that she “hate[s] when vice can bolt her arguments, / And virtue has no tongue to check her pride” before she refutes his arguments with wisdom (760-61). Comus cannot possess such intellectual valor, for “[a]ll wickedness is weakness” of discretion (*Samson Agonistes* line 834).

A more fully developed version of Comus and the Lady appears in Milton’s *Paradise Lost* which furthers Milton’s idea of Christian heroism. Satan, like Comus, is able to present vice through brilliant rhetoric. He addresses fallen angels as “Powers / Matchless” (II.622), manipulates his daughter Sin with “smooth” words (II. 816), and flatters Eve with titles such as “Empress of the fair World” (IX.568). However, Satan’s rhetoric, though beautifully poetic, disguises the “vice” the Lady of Comus “hate[s]” (*Comus* 760). Behind each deceitful compliment are the admissions that Satan’s “Matchless” peers could never defeat “Heav’n’s matchless King” (IV.41), that Sin’s father speaks as a “subtle Fiend” (II.815), and that Eve’s happiness is a “Hell” to her flatterer (IV. 358). Satan’s wife, however, is not intellectual valor. Gabriel’s quick responses to his adversary’s excuses at last render Satan “abasht” as he “fe[els] how awful goodness is” (IV.846-47). Yet Gabriel’s heroism is a reflection of his Creator, the true hero of *Paradise Lost*. Mueller rightly observes that Milton’s theology demands that “Christ [is] the only figure to whom the perfection of the epic hero could be attributed” (308). Therefore, the Son heroically executes the Father’s will both in speech and in action.

The Son’s speech displays him to be *Paradise Lost*’s hero when he with “meek aspect” declares he “shall rise Victorious, and subdue / [his] vanquisher” (III.266, 250-51). According to

Comment [R9]: Herman is the author of one of the secondary sources. Simply put his last name first followed by the page number.

Comment [R10]: Because the author’s name is in the sentence (Mueller is the first word of the sentence), only the page number is necessary in the citation.

Comment [R11]: When you come to a line break while quoting poetry, be sure to use a slash to show that break, allowing for one space before and after the slash.

Whittington, “Milton invites us to read the Son’s voluntary self-sacrifice, the poem’s central act of heroism, in conjunction with [a similar] episode of the Aeneid” (590). The Son’s use of language echoes classical heroic speeches; nevertheless, he speaks with an effortless authority that neither the classical heroes Odysseus and Aeneas nor the Miltonic villains Satan and Comus can assume. The Father proves the Son’s true heroism when he states that the Son’s words “merit” him to be “worthiest to be [the Son of God] by being Good” (III.309-310).

Comment [R12]: Use brackets to clarify missing information

Yet Milton’s concept of heroism cannot be defined as simply mental alacrity. The Lady of *Comus*’s heroism is intellectual, but her intellect has been developed through biblical principles. Comus “feel[s] that [he] do[es] fear / Her words set off by some superior power” (800-01). The Lady’s ability to resist temptation is not a quickly formed scheme of survival, but a Christian virtue the heroine has developed through continued dependence upon the Holy Spirit. The Lady’s virtue is sufficient to withstand temptation because it is “accompanied by divine grace” (Jenkins 74). The Elder Brother has observed her “hidden strength” and speaks of it before he is even aware of her imminent danger (415). While Odysseus learns of the moly’s powers just before he enters Circe’s palace, the Lady has cherished the Christian doctrine of chastity long before her temptation.

The Son displays himself to be the epitome of heroism through his virtue as well. The chastity of the Lady is a reflection of the virtues of God, for while Satan is the “Author of evil” (VI.263), this Messiah embodies the “Virtue and Grace / Immense [the Father] ha[s] transfus’d” into him, “that all may know / In Heaven’ and Hell [the Son’s] Power above compare” (VI.704-05). The Son is the creator of the Lady’s “hidden strength” and can therefore “[a]scend [God’s]

Comment [R13]: The writer is quoting Paradise Lost and is therefore using book number in roman numerals. line to cite his quotes.

Comment [R14]: The original word was capitalized, so the brackets show that the letter [a] has been changed.

Works Cited

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Comment [R15]: Center the title Works Cited. List all entries alphabetically by last name. Indent second and following lines of each entry .5 inches.

Comment [R16]: This is an article in a print reference book. Notice that the Ed. Means that the following names are those of the editors.

Comment [R17]: These are the page numbers the article written by Bauer was found in. The "Print" shows this was an actual book.

Comment [R18]: This is a simple book entry by one author.

Comment [R19]: This source is an online article from a database. *College English* is the name of the journal, 21.1 is the volume number.issue number, (1959) is the year of publication, and 13-17 are the page numbers. *MLA International Bibliography* is the name of the database where the writer found the article. He first used the article in his paper on 3 Dec. 2013, so he will write down Web. 3 Dec. 2013 as his date of access.

Comment [R20]: Milton wrote all the works that have ---, so instead of writing his full name again, the writer simply put --- to show Milton is still the author of the following sources.

Comment [R21]: Although the Milton selections are all from the same book, the page numbers are different to show where they are found in that book.

Comment [R22]: Once again, this is an article from an online database. See above for explanation.